

## Take care of you



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Calving season is definitely one of my favorite times of year. It's thrilling to anticipate the birth of that next calf crop, to witness the miracle of life and to see those young calves start life's journey.

However, calving season also brings with it its share of stress.

The labor force can be stretched pretty thin. Round-the-clock calving on top of the usual chore load, school activities and putting in the spring crop can lead to sleep deprivation and worry. Add in uncooperative weather, news broadcasts focused on all life's negatives, and a dismal 10-day forecast — well, it's enough to make you want to crawl back in bed.

As we dig out from a snowstorm and face subzero temperatures, I want to share the following from the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF). Remember, long-term herd health depends on you taking care of you.

### Breaking the stress cycle

John Shutske, professor and Extension agricultural safety and health specialist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, outlined the cause of stress and best practices for coping with high levels of it during a workshop at the AFBF's 100th Annual Convention.

Working with farmers on stress management for more than 30 years, Shutske encouraged farmers to implement strategies to handle pressure to minimize the effects of stress.

"Stress impacts farmers mentally and physically and it comes in many formats," said Shutske. "A lot of time when we talk about stress we focus on short-term impact, but we need to also look at long-term stress."

Shutske explained the cycle of stress and the effect it has on the human brain. He further explained that normal stress isn't concerning, it's the long-term chronic stress that is most worrisome.

"If you have constant levels of high stress, your brain receptors physically begin to wear out," said Shutske. "If your brain is constantly fueling stress hormones, it can lead to serious problems."

Not only can stress affect blood pressure and anxiety, it can also severely affect relationships.

### Be proactive

Shutske encouraged farmers to focus on the things they can control in their businesses and relationships, rather than things they can't. He suggested proactively managing stress with these tips:

**PLAN** Look ahead to the coming weeks and plan out what you can. This includes setting time aside for family and hobbies.

**SET GOALS** Goal setting can help you stay focused on what needs to get done. Set goals that are specific, measurable, action-orientated, realistic and time-specific.

**WRITE THINGS DOWN** Writing things down helps you mentally prepare for the tasks on your to-do list. Typing on a device doesn't always have the same effect.

**HEALTH** Maintaining overall health is important to moderate stress levels. Don't underestimate the importance of visiting your family practitioner and openly discussing mental health.

**FUEL** With the brain using 25% of the body's energy, eating a balanced diet must be a priority to manage stress. Watching caffeine and sugar intake is equally important.

**EXERCISE** Exercise shouldn't be overlooked as a stress-management tool. Staying active regularly can help balance stress levels.

**RELAXATION** It's important to take time to reflect or meditate. Taking time to relax and reflect is important to moderating stress levels.

### Back to me

Preparation and prayer top my stress-mitigation strategies. We hope you'll find this issue themed "Prepare for calving" just what the doctor ordered. |

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